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Seminary Entrance Requirements

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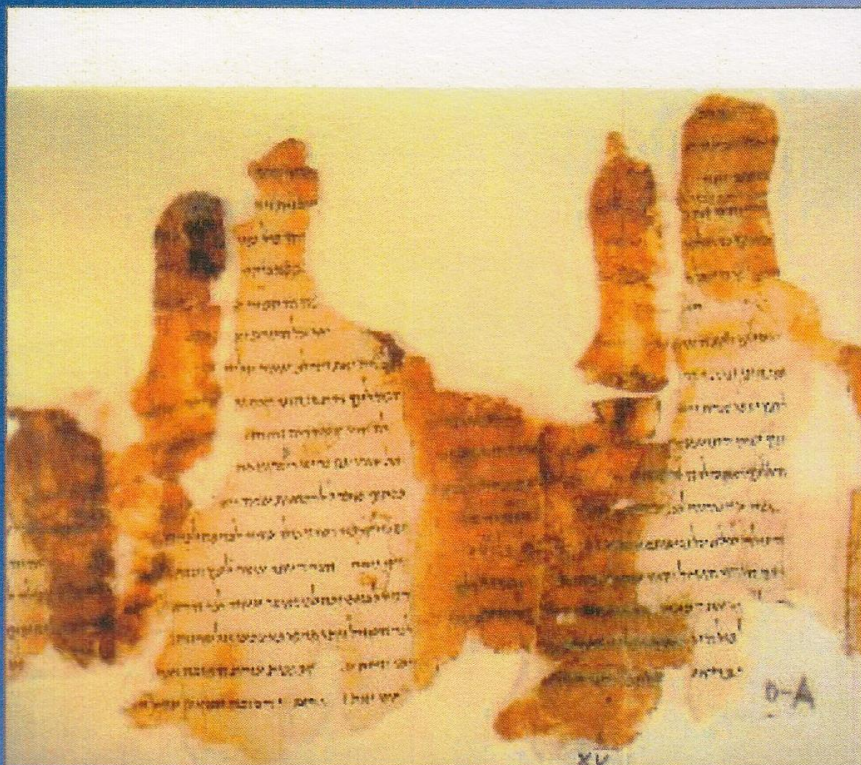
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Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

2008 Seminary Scholarship Symposium



February 5, 7-8, 2008

Abstracts: Breakout Sessions

Teresa Reeve, Assistant Professor of New Testament Contexts
Rite from the Very Beginning: Rites of Passage in Luke 1-4
11:30am Room S-120

Rites of passage were an assumed part of social life in the world in which the New Testament was written. Biographers of the time, thus, often did not bother to report on such rites in the lives of their subjects unless mention of the rite suited a particular purpose of the author. It is of interest, then, that the narratives of Luke 1-2, most of which are unique to Luke among the canonical Gospels, can be seen to be structured around a series of rites of passage climaxing with the interlocked ritual accounts of Luke 3:1-4:15. This paper will use a ritual studies approach to explore the use and function of these rites of passage with special attention to the way in which Luke-Acts presents these climactic scenes at the Jordan.

Peter Swanson, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care,
Chair, Christian Ministry Department

Seminary Entrance Requirements

8:30am Room N235

This paper presents an analysis of the published entrance requirements to Master of Divinity Programs at one hundred and thirty seminaries and divinity schools accredited by the Association of Theological Schools. Implications for Theological Education are considered.

SEMINARY ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS

**A Paper read by H. Peter Swanson at the Seminary Scholarship Symposium
At Andrews University on February 8, 2008
Research Assistance by Kenley Hall**

ABSTRACT: An analysis of the published entrance requirements to Master of Divinity programs at one hundred and thirty seminaries and divinity schools accredited by the Association of Theological Schools. Implications for Theological Education are considered.

Methodology

The list of accredited seminaries on the Association of Theological Schools' web site was examined and one hundred and thirty seminaries were selected based on the following criteria: representation among denominations, enrolment, and geographical location. The objective was to obtain a broadly representative view of the entrance requirements of some two hundred and fifty ATS seminaries and divinity schools based on the stratified sample. The data provided in the published bulletins and on the web sites of these schools were tabulated, analyzed, and are discussed in this paper.

Preliminary Observations

It is generally assumed that the entrance criteria established by seminaries are intended to enable the admissions officers to select from all applicants to the Master of Divinity programs those who appear to be best suited to ministry. Similarly, individuals who do not show promise for ministry can be identified and screened out, based on the entrance criteria. These assumptions will be examined in the light of the findings of this research.

The greatest shared agreement about how to measure an applicant's acceptability as a seminary student seems to be the letter of recommendation. One hundred twenty-seven (98%) of the seminaries required between one and five letters. One seminary required 1, sixteen required 2,

fifty-four required 3, fifty required 4, and six seminaries required 5 letters of recommendation.

Identified recommenders are as follows: pastor - 95, professor - 94, general - 86, employer - 27, church board - 17, denominational official - 8.

Letters of recommendation are recognized to be a flawed means of identifying the best applicants because if the natural hesitancy of some recommenders to put in writing sentiments that may limit the recommendee's chances for personal advancement. In addition, there is great variability in the levels of acquaintance of the recommenders with the applicants, and similarly, wide variations in the astuteness with which recommenders are able to evaluate the candidates. This latter limitation is compounded by the fact that some applicants are able to present themselves to great personal advantage while others are not as socially skilled.

The second most widely adopted criterion is the TOEFL score with 115 of the 130 seminaries using this requirement. The range of the Test of English as a Foreign Language scores was from 500 - 600 on the Written Test and from 213 - 237 on the computer-administered test. On the Written test fifty-three seminaries used a score of 550 and eight used 600 as their criterion. Small numbers of seminaries were scattered along the continuum of the range. In addition to the TOEFL many seminaries had some form of writing-skill evaluation with mandatory remedial classes for individuals with deficiencies. A few seminaries also required a pronunciation, or speech proficiency assessment.

Apart from acknowledged problems associated with error of measurement, the objectivity of this criterion provides a reasonably high level of consistency of evaluation of the language skills that are central to the practice of ministry.

Ninety-four Seminaries required an autobiography as an entrance requirement. Fifteen of these required the length to be less than 500 words, thirty-three seminaries required between 500 and

1000 words, and twenty-two seminaries required the autobiographical statement to be greater than 1000 words. Twenty-four seminaries did not specify the length.

In addition to, or instead of the autobiography, 32 seminaries required a personal statement about the reasons why the applicant chose a particular seminary, their goals and purposes, their strengths and weaknesses, their sense of calling, etc. Some seminaries provided a list of issues to be addressed in the personal statement and the selection of issues varied across denominations. Thirteen seminaries required a sample of academic writing ability. Here the emphasis was not as much upon grammatical and writing skills as upon the ability of the applicants to think and express themselves logically, philosophically and theologically. Topics were assigned, journal articles for review were cited, and doctrinal understanding and allegiance were assessed by this method.

The Grade Point Average (GPA) of applicants is likely the single most widely used entrance criterion used by programs of Higher Learning. Its utility is based on its value to encapsulate the sweep of a student's academic performance into one objective measure. There remain questions about its reliability as a means of predicting academic performance. However, when balanced against the weight of an applicant's subjective sense of "calling" to ministry, it can serve as an objective indicator of past performance and, informed thereby, inferences may be drawn about the applicant's likelihood of future success in the academic endeavor.

Our research shows that 84, or 63% of seminaries use GPA as an entrance criterion. Eleven of these use 2.0, thirty-six use 2.5, fourteen use 2.75, and ten use 3.0 as the GPA entrance criterion. The remaining eleven seminaries use various points between these GPA scores for their entrance expectations. It was clear that a clean cut-off at the designated GPA level was not easy to apply across the board. Seminaries therefore used a number of approaches to deal with applicants who

did not quite make the GPA requirement. Some were admitted provisionally on a reduced-load basis to give them opportunity to demonstrate if they could manage graduate-level work. Others had to demonstrate ability by achieving a designated score on the Miller Analogies Test in order to qualify for acceptance.

Twenty-four schools asked for Graduate Record Examination scores. These were sometimes in addition to a GPA requirement, and were sometimes used as a measure of academic promise when a person lacked the required GPA, when an applicant did not have a recognized undergraduate degree, or if the degree was from an unaccredited institution. Required GRE scores were typically 500 and above for the verbal and quantitative scales, and 4.5 and above for the analytical scale.

A personal interview with applicants was referenced by 39 seminaries. Six of these indicated that the interview “may be required” and the remaining seminaries expected the interviews to be conducted by various individuals such as registrars, deans, directors of admissions, faculty, etc. or by committees. One seminary indicated that the interview could be conducted by telephone. Fifteen seminaries included a criminal background check or security clearance as part of the application process. In some instances the applicant had to pay for, and supply the report at the time of application. In other cases the seminary initiated and paid for the background check. Thirteen seminaries expected some form of psychological evaluation such as the Weschler Adult Intelligence Scales III, the Taylor-Johnson, or the Meyers-Briggs. In some cases these evaluations were done by independent consulting psychiatrists or psychologists, in other cases psychological evaluations were used, not as screening measures, but as a means of personal formation and development during the students’ time in the seminary.

A dozen seminaries required Denominational Endorsement as a condition of acceptance.

Some of the less widely used requirements included resumes or curriculum vitae, Bible Competency Exams, declarations of agreement with doctrinal positions, a statement by the applicant's spouse or fiancé, and in one case, documentation of a full year of post-college self-supporting ministry. Much more typical were academic expectations of a broad liberal arts undergraduate preparation that included courses such as Philosophy, Social Sciences, Religion, and in some instances, Biblical Languages.

This non-exhaustive overview of requirements for entrance into Master of Divinity degrees at seminaries in North America and Canada reveals commonalities and distinctives. It also raises questions for consideration, and challenges assumptions.

Are we justified in assuming that the entrance criteria that are in place at seminaries achieve the purpose of identifying applicants who will do well during seminary training and who will then succeed well in ministry? Similarly, are those who are unsuited for ministry actually screened out by these criteria?

Stated differently, is what we are measuring, what we need to be measuring? And if so, how well are we measuring what we are measuring? If we are not measuring what we should be measuring, what should we be measuring, and how should we go about it?

The findings presented in this paper will have served us well if they spark lively conversations about these important matters.